

ADVERTISEMENT

PERHAPS it will be thought that pieces written so much in the manner of set compositions as the following, should not have been denominated Letters ; it may therefore be proper to say that they are so called because they were actually addressed to a friend.* They were written however with an intention to put them in print, if, when they were finished, the writer could persuade himself that they deserved it; and the temper of even the most inconsiderable pretenders to literature in these times is too well known for any one to be surprised that he *could* so persuade himself.

When he began these letters, his intention was to confine himself within such limits, that essays on twelve or fifteen subjects might be comprised in a volume. But he soon found that so narrow a space would exclude many illustrations not less appropriate or useful than any which would be introduced.

It will not seem a very natural manner of commencing a course of letters to a friend, to enter formally on a subject in the first sentence. In excuse for this abruptness it may be mentioned, that there was an introductory letter; but as it was written in the presumption that a considerable variety of subjects would be treated in the compass of a moderate number of letters it is omitted, as not being adapted to precede what is executed in a manner so different from the design.

* See the *Life of John Foster* prefixed to this edition, p. v.